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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
Agricultural Research Service,  
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JOB-RELATED EXPENDITURES OF WORKING WIVES //

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By Emma G. Holmes, Home Economist

Thirty percent of U. S. wives (husband present) are in the labor force, according to recent Census Bureau figures. This represents a considerable change since 1940, when only about 15 percent of wives were employed. The biggest increase has been among women in their 30's and 40's, old enough so that their children are likely to be in school or college, or out on their own. But there has been a tendency, too, for more mothers of young children to be gainfully employed.

The outlook is for increasing numbers of women in the labor force. It is anticipated that the rate of employment of women 35 to 44 years old particularly will rise. This conclusion is based on two trends that have been noted. The first is the tendency for women to complete their families earlier, even though they are having more children. The second is the trend toward increased years of schooling, which will mean more women with college training. Women who have been to college, census reports show, are more likely to be gainfully employed than those with fewer years of schooling.

The question of whether a wife should work or should heed the old teaching that "woman's place is in the home" has many angles. Books, feature articles, and research reports have been written about the social, psychological, and economic implications of the trend toward higher employment rates among wives. A question frequently raised is how much farther ahead the family will be financially if the wife takes a job than if she remains a full-time homemaker and devotes her energies to household production. As an employed woman she will have expenses she would not have as a housewife. How much of her earnings will these take? How much will other family expenses be increased? How much will she have left to add to the family purse? Answers to these questions will be helpful in fitting the wife's earnings into the family financial plan.

Last spring we interviewed 365 wives living in 4 small cities in Georgia to learn something about the job-related expenses of working wives and the possible contribution these women could make to the family income. The families we visited were selected from a representative sample that had been included in a consumer marketing study done by the Georgia Experiment Station.

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From this sample we took all the families that met the requirements we had set up. These were (1) that the family must include both husband and wife, and have been in existence during all of 1957; (2) the husband must have had full-time employment during 1957; (3) the household must have not more than 6 members; (4) the wife must be under 55 years of age; and (5) the wife must, during 1957 have been either employed for 1,000 or more hours--that is, at least half time--or not employed at all. (6) If employed, the wife must not have worked in a business owned by the family, in which her husband also worked. The latter rule was made to exclude women who might not be able to give income figures for the year. We imposed these restrictions to limit somewhat the number of variables affecting our results.

In all cases, the wife was the family member interviewed, though frequently the husband was present and participated. In approximately half of the 365 families the wife was employed in 1957, and in half she was not. For the sake of brevity I will call these two groups of families the employed and the nonemployed families, in reference to the work status of the wife.

Description of the families.--Ideally we would have liked to match up the two groups of wives with respect to such characteristics as age, education, number of children, and income. In practice, however, we found this impossible in so small a sample. The employed wives in the study tended to be older than the nonemployed. The employed group included more all-adult families, fewer with small children, and fewer with more than 1 child under 18. About 30 percent of the employed wives had children under 6, compared to 60 percent of the nonemployed. As for education, both groups were about the same. Approximately half of the wives in each group had less than high school education; about 1/8 had one or more years of college training.

Another way in which the two groups differed was in amount of income earned by the husbands. Families with employed wives were less well off than those of nonemployed wives with respect to disposable income from the husband's earnings plus whatever amounts came from interest, dividends, rents and boarders. About 70 percent of the husbands of employed wives had after-tax incomes under \$4,000, compared to 50 percent of the nonemployed. At the high end of the income scale, 10 percent of the employed wives had husbands with \$5,000 or more after taxes, compared to 28 percent of the nonemployed.

Employment of the wife.--Textile mills provided the largest single source of employment for the women. Forty-five percent of them were in mill or similar operative jobs, 25 percent were clerical and sales workers, 17 percent household and other service workers, and 12 percent had professional and managerial positions. Half of the employed wives worked full time in 1957--that is, 2,000 hours or more; the other half worked varying lengths of time between 1,000 and 2,000 hours. The younger wives, who frequently had small children, were less likely to be full-time workers than the older wives. Some of the textile workers had less than full-time work because the mills were not in full production toward the end of 1957.

Earnings of the employed wives in 1957 ranged from \$388 to \$5,006 before taxes and deductions. About 3/4 of the women earned less than \$3,000 and the average was \$2,200. Adding the wife's income to the husband's changed the income distribution of the employed group considerably. Wives' earnings reduced the proportion of families with less than \$3,000 after taxes from 40 percent to 11 percent of the employed group, and increased the proportion

with \$5,000 or more from 10 to 54 percent. The feeling of a need for more money than the husband's income provided was an important factor in the wives' decisions to work. More than four-fifths of the wives gave economic reasons when we asked them why they were employed.

How much could the wives contribute to income?--The main purpose of the study was to learn how much of her total income would be left for family use after expenses related to the wife's employment were taken out. This meant deducting for such things as income taxes, social security, transportation to and from work, and lunches at work. We also felt that a deduction should be made for additional paid help used by employed wives to make their house-keeping tasks lighter. In addition, we wondered what difference, if any, having an income of her own might make in the amount the wife spent for her own clothing and personal care. We obtained information about expenditures for paid help, clothing, and personal care from all the wives, so we could compare those of the employed with the nonemployed.

Paid help.--The expenditures for paid help that we took into consideration included those for household help, whether to care for children, do laundry, or for general housework; care for children outside the home; laundry work away from home; and help for sewing. More employed than nonemployed wives reported each of these types of help.

Nine out of 10 of the employed women compared to 7 out of 10 of the nonemployed reported some expenditure for one or more of the kinds of help I have just named. Paid laundry work was mentioned by both groups more frequently than any other work--by 76 percent of the employed and 59 percent of the nonemployed. Half of the employed wives and 1/4 of the nonemployed wives hired general housework done, while only 31 percent of the employed and 18 percent of the nonemployed paid for sewing help.

Obviously practices of hiring help for child care would be related to family type. Among the families with children under 6, 92 percent of the employed and 29 percent of the nonemployed reported paid help for child care. Among those with children 6 to 17 years old but none younger, 36 percent of the employed but only 7 percent of the nonemployed had such expenditures. Paid help to care for the child in his own home was much more common than care outside the home. This usually meant that the wife got some help with general housework or laundry work, as well as with the children.

The average expenditure for paid help was \$256 for the employed, \$73 for the nonemployed wives. In the employed group, spending for help increased with the husband's income, and varied a great deal among families of different types. On the average, working wives with children under 6 years old paid \$403 for help, compared with \$248 for those with children 6 to 17 only, and \$143 for those with adults only at home. In the nonemployed group, expenditure for help increased as the husband's income rose, but the presence of children in the family seemed to affect it very little.

Clothing expenditures.--The clothing expenditures used in calculating the extra amount spent by the working wives included amounts for the main items in a woman's wardrobe except underclothing, nightwear, and such sportswear as shorts and slacks. They also included cost of materials bought to make the listed garments, and expense for care, such as cleaning and shoe repair.



Employed wives spent more, on the average, for both clothing and personal care than nonemployed wives did. For clothing the average was \$197 for the employed, \$113 for the nonemployed. Wives whose husbands were at similar income levels spent more for their clothing when they were earning their own money than when they were not. We do not know how much of the extra amount spent by the working wives was due to the demands of her job, how much to the fact that she had more to spend and perhaps felt more free to spend on herself than when she was using her husband's earnings. Employed wives reported expenditures averaging \$54 for personal care, nonemployed wives \$33.

### Calculating the wife's net money income

Now we are ready to calculate the net amount these working wives might have to contribute to the cash available for use by their families. Our first step was to calculate the Federal and State income taxes on family income with and without the wife's earnings. We allowed for standard deductions, and assumed a joint return on the combined earnings of husband and wife. We felt that such estimates might be more accurate than those we would get from the families, since the interviews preceded the filing date for the 1957 tax returns. We included the difference between the two tax estimates in the expenses we considered directly related to the wife's job. These employment-related expenses also included payments for social security and other retirement plans; transportation to and from work; lunches and snacks at work; gifts, flowers and contributions for coworkers; clothing used exclusively for work, like uniforms and jeans; and a few other items.

Here is how the average figures for the entire group of employed wives look:

	<u>Averages for 186 employed wives</u>
Amount earned.....	\$2,200
Job-related expenses.....	614
Remainder.....	1,586
Extra expense for paid help.....	184
Extra expense for clothing and personal care	105
Net available for family use.....	1,297

"Extra" expense for paid help and "extra" for clothing and personal care, you remember, are the average amounts spent by employed wives minus those spent by the nonemployed for these items.

According to this calculation, 28 percent of the average amount earned by the 186 working wives went for expenses directly related to their jobs; 8 percent for the additional expense she had for hired help; and 5 percent for added expenses for clothing and personal care. The amount remaining is about 3/5 of the sum paid her by her employer for her work.



An over-all average for the entire group of employed wives obscures the fact that there may be large variations related to income, family composition, and other characteristics of the group. As I pointed out earlier, for example, the presence or absence of children in the home makes quite a difference in the working wife's expenditure for hired help. Average earnings, job-related expenses, and "extra" expenses for employed wives in the three types of families we recognized in this study varied as follows:

	Averages for 3 types of families--		
	All-adult	With chil- dren 6-17 only	With chil- dren un- der 6
Wife's earnings.....	\$2,229	\$2,249	\$2,099
Job-related expenses.....	675	589	576
Remainder.....	1,554	1,660	1,523
Extra for paid help.....	69	187	326
Extra for clothing and personal care.....	134	73	105
Net available for family use.....	1,351	1,400	1,092

Average earnings of the wives in first two family type groups were approximately the same, but they were a little lower for the group with small children, partly because these wives tended to work fewer hours. "Extra" expense for paid help increased from \$69 in the all-adult group, to \$326 for the wives with children under 6. Wives in the adult group made the largest extra expenditure for clothing and personal care. The net amount left after deductions and extra expenses was a little more than 3/5 of the average earnings of the wives in the groups made up of adults and of parents with children 6 to 17 years old, and a little more than half the earnings of the wives with small children to be cared for.

The size of the husband's income makes a difference too. We divided the families into three groups on the basis of the husband's income. The "job-related expense" item took an increasing amount as the husband's income rose, and also an increasing proportion of the wife's earnings. "Extra" for clothing increased with the husband's income too. The "extra" amount the employed wives spent for clothing as compared with nonemployed wives with husbands in the same income groups also increased as income rose. The "extra" spent for help by wives with low-income husbands was considerably less than that spent when the husbands had medium or high incomes. Net income from the wife's earnings amounted to about 2/3 of the total in the low-income group, decreased to a little more than half in the high income group.

I want to remind you at this point that an average doesn't necessarily represent or apply to any one family or situation. Within the group on which the average is based there would be many variations--incomes considerably

below or above, spending varying from considerably less to considerably more than the average. Also, the figures I am giving you represent the experience and practices of families meeting specific requirements and living in a specific locality, and would not be expected to be applicable to those in other situations.

Some of the additional expenses we have charged to the employed wife may have in them elements of gain for the family. The extra expense for the wife's clothing, for example, may mean a better-dressed wife and therefore an increase in personal satisfaction. The deduction for social security provides protection against certain hazards. The cost of meals at work is not all additional expense, for the wife's food at home would cost something and we have not taken this into account.

This is a preliminary report of material we are still in the process of analyzing. Among the data we haven't had time to look at yet, is some information about family food buying and preparation practices. We asked about the use of prepared and partially prepared foods like canned, frozen, and baked foods, and mixes. We also asked about home food preservation, expenditures for school lunches, and meals eaten out other than those at work and school. So far we have examined only the data for school lunches.

It seemed likely that school lunches might represent another added expense for the working mother. Actually, however, approximately 9 out of 10 families with school children 6 to 17 years old in both the employed and nonemployed groups reported expenditures for lunches at school, and the average expenditures per child were about the same. Evidently lunch at school for at least part of the school year is an accepted thing for school-age children in these Georgia cities whether mother is working or not.

The Georgia study was an exploratory one. As you have seen, it touched on only a few of the problems related to the employment of wives. Some other questions people are already asking us are: What effect does the employment of the wife have on family expenditures for recreation? for furniture? for children's clothing? for education? We are interested, also, in information about the rural wives who work outside the home as well as those in cities. These are questions for further studies, and we hope to delve into them in the future.



Chart 1

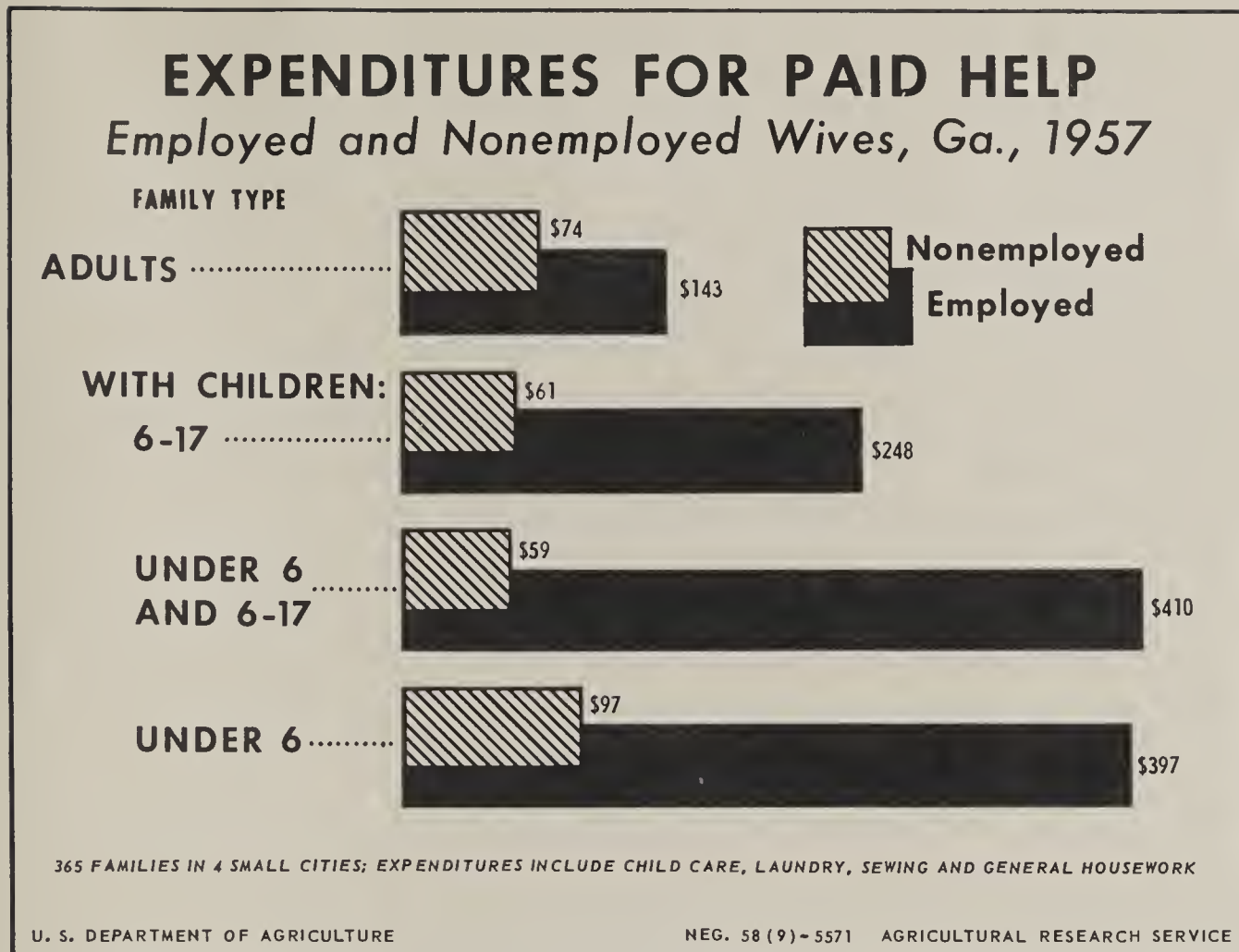


Chart 2

